New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1945

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THEATRE OPENINGS

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Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the compelte reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Lady in Danger"

Comedy-mystery by Max Afford and Alexander Kirkland; staging by Clarence Derwent; setting designed by Harry Gordon Bennett; presented at the Broadhurst Theater Thursday, March 29, 1945, by Pat Allen and Dan Fisher.

THE CAST

Bill Sefton.....James Ganon
Monica Sefton.....Helen Claire
Miss Hodges.....Elfrida Derwent
Dr. Francis Gresham....Alexander Kirkland
Sylvia Meade.....Vicki Cummings
Andrew Meade.....Rodney McLennan
Karl Kurt.....Paul Fairleigh
Chief Inspector Burke.....Clarence Derwent
Detective Dennis Marsh....Ronald Alexander
Constable Pogson.....Hudson Faussett
Frederick Smith.....Gary Blivers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 30, 1945

'Lady in Danger' Comes to Broadhurst

By ROBERT GARLAND

LAST NIGHT, at the Broadhurst, Pat Allen and Dan Fisher presented "Lady in Danger." "Lady in Danger" is an alleged "comedy-mystery" by Max Afford and Alexander Kirkland. I don't know Mr. Afford, but I do know Mr. Kirkland. And Mr. Kirkland should know better.

Featured in the cast are Helen Claire ("Kiss the Boys Goodbye"), Vicki Cummings ("Yes, My Darling Daughter"), Clarence Derwent ("Mary, Queen of Scots"), and Mr. Kirkland ("Men in White").

In the supporting cast are James Ganon ("Dark Hammock"), Elfrida Derwent ("Kind Lady"), Rodney McLennan ("Johnny 2 x 4"), Paul Fairleigh ("Seven Lively Arts"), Ronald Alexander ("Sophie"), Hudson Faussett ("Assassin of Youth") and Gary Blivers, who must be making his on-and-off stage debut.

The action of the play, if any, takes place in Mr. and Mrs. Bill Sefton's apartment, "Villa Flats," Melbourne, Australia, during a Summer evening. The first scene is at 6 p.m. The fifth scene is at three a.m. the following morning. It seems longer.

The scenery was built by United Studios. Miss Claire's wardrobe is by Maurice. Miss Cummings' third act suit is by Pattullo. Hats are by Eric Brageard. Hair styles are by Charles of the Ritz. Bags are by Coro. Gloves are by Dawnelle. Stockings are by Nu-Maid. Liquors are by Park-Benzinger. The management is not responsible for personal property or apparel of patrons. Patrons are advised to take their coats and wraps with them whenever they leave their seats.

Clarence Derwent acts like a director and directs like an actor. The others are faithful to him. The authors never use one word when four will do. And, in this alleged "comedy-mystery," there's no comedy and the only mystery is how "Lady in Danger" ever reached the stage at all.

According to programs at the Broadhurst, the exit indicated by the red light is the shortest route to the street. All evening I yearned to use it.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 30, 1945

Meow!

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"LADY IN DANGER," last night's melodrama at the Broadhurst, started out as though it might be normal. A black cat came through the window, left, and strolled across the stage. A corpse fell from the closet, center, relaxing gracefully so as not to hurt itself on the hard floor. But after that the illusion of normalcy went away, and the Max Afford-Alexander Kirkland gimerack settled down to become almost an epic of its kind. Seldom have so many words found their way to a single melodrama, seldom so little action, seldom have actors carried on so hopelessly, like dogs baying wistfully at the moon. Most of the time the lady's chief danger was that the audience might break into macabre laughter—which, indeed, it started to on several occasions.

The play, Australian born, is about fascism and spies. It is a little confused in that the villains speak German while carrying Japanese flags, although why they murder the "Australian Firster" and his chauffeur never is quite clear. Nor is it clear why they bumped off the latter in the apartment of an American war correspondent, save perhaps that he had a pretty wife who wrote detective novels. At any rate, the police come along, with "Lady in Danger" being a clear libel on the cops Down Under; another newspaper reporter, filled with gin, beating them at their job. The play does not burn with a hard, gemlike flame, nor does it make much sense. In it, Helen Claire and Vicki Cummings are nice looking blondes, Mr. Kirkland is a psychiatrist and Clarence Derwent is the police inspector. At one point last night one of the ladies faced the audience as though daring it to reply and remarked: "A thing like this makes you realize that what you've got is not so bad after all."

The laughter had an evil sound.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 30, 1945

Dismal Doings in 44th Street

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SHOULD these lines meet the eye of any youths or maidens who are pining in their innocence to be drama critics, I would have them remember that the job involves sitting through things like *Lady in Danger*. And not just sitting through them, but afterwards writing about them. For one does not come slowly out of a stupor gally poised for literary composition. Exhausting experiences call for wet towels, not winged words. And *Lady in Danger*, I assure you, is a truly exhausting experience. Called a comedy-mystery, it is one of the dullest, slowest, silliest, most inept, most ill-acted affairs of the season. The only thing scary about it is some of the jokes. The only thing comical is some of the melodrama.

The plot is not something you can just rattle off. It pivots round the murder—in Melbourne, Australia—of a pro-Japanese plutocrat and his chauffeur. The "weapon" is a black tomcat with poisoned claws. Suspicion points to a young woman whose husband the plutocrat had tried to get fired from his job, and whose detective-story writing had taught her a lot aobut poisons. Though obviously innocent, the young woman has a terrible time, first getting slung into jail, and then (the Australian police seem singularly easy-going people) being handed over to the real criminals, who try to drug, poison and hang her. But though the fiends can outwit the dopes at the local Scotland Yard, they have to reckon with a whale of a newspaperman who, by drinking glasses of neat gin, sees everything in a flash and saves the day.

There may be an idea in all this. But *Lady in Danger* is so tortured with dismal dialogue and clumsy craftsmanship, so overdone in its few suspenseful moments, so wretchedly paced and hopelessly acted, that it would kill off an idea a hundred times as good.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 30, 1945

No Danger of a Hit

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE have been fugitive rumors that "Lady in Danger" was a sleeper. That, in case you do not know the Main Stem lexicon, is the word for an unheralded hit. The new offering at the Broadhurst does not fit the bill. Irrespective of tub-thumping this new melodrama by Max Afford and Alexander Kirkland is genuinely soporific rather than striking. Trying vainly to conjure up both comedy and suspense, the production is good evidence that cute killing on the stage has to be done with considerable style and construction.

• •

Neither of these qualities is apparent in the newest offering on Broadway. For all the frantic acting of the company, "Lady In Danger" remains a five-finger exercise in melodramatic—a chopstick job in terms of humor. The Australian setting, with Nazi agents carrying Jap flags around in unlikely places, might have framed a grim and absorbing international intrigue thriller. Unfortunately, one is likely to care very little whether or not a German doctor makes away with the wife of an American officer, for reasons which escaped me completely in the dramatic exposition.

• •

Anyway, for the records, Kirkland himself plays the villain's role with a minimum of effect, Vicki Cummings is decorative as a reporter's wife and Helen Claire swoons through the perils of a modern Pauline. The actor-author is remarkably restrained in this new role, but he might better have hammed up the part. The play is not solid enough for solid characterizations. All the principals are hog-tied from the start.

• •

Clarence Derwent is altogether the best of them. As a police inspector who blunders onto an espionage ring, he gives the piece a slight flavor of satirical terror. His direction does not match his acting. The fact is that "Lady in Danger" is definitely sleep-provoking without being a sleeper. It should have remained unheralded and unknown.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 30, 1945

'Lady in Danger' a Tepid Chiller With an Australian Background

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"LADY IN DANGER" was a nice little chiller to present on a warm evening at the Broadhurst Theatre—but I fear its chills are too tepid to survive the rigors of really hot nights.

An Australian whodunit, it concerns Jap and Nazi agents and a cat which scratches people to death because its claws have been treated with poison. The play is well mannered and sometimes it works up excitement, but its development is slow and the conversational fill-ins are too often just fill-ins.

The author is an Australian, Max Afford; and Mr. Afford's script has been worked over by Alexander Kirkland, who also plays an important role. The story concerns an American war correspondent, his wife, an Aussie newspaperman and his wife, all in Melbourne.

That Corpse Again

The quartet get on the track of evil doings and before they know it a murder is planted on them. A corpse falls out of a closet. In melodramas, anybody who is careless enough to get killed in a closet never slumps to the floor, but just stands there so he can fall out when somebody opens the door. Last night's corpse had been clawed by a cat whose paws had been dipped in curare.

This was very bad for Helen Claire, the war correspondent's wife, for she had been writing a detective story and had been doing much research on murder by poison. In no time at all Chief Inspector Clarence Derwent has pinned the killing on her.

Miss Claire makes a properly anguished heroine. James Ganon is pleasant and manful as her husband. Rodney McLennan plays the Australian newspaperman as though he really must be Australian because I never

saw an American pressman like him. Vicki Cummings looks chic and has the smart cracks somebody always has to make in a play like this, and Elfrida Derwent adds suspense and suspicion in the role of a nosy landlady.

Mr. Derwent plays a chief inspector quietly and deliberately, and he directed "Lady in Danger" in the same fashion. The producers are Miss Pat Allen and Dan Fisher, newcomers to the trade.

NEW YORK POST
March 30, 1945

'Lady in Danger' Is Still a Mystery to This Reporter

By WILELLA WALDORF

IT is not considered cricket for reviewers to divulge the plot when a mystery play arrives, and it's a rule that is going to save us a good deal of agony in the case of "Lady in Danger," produced last night at the Broadhurst Theatre. There was so much plot lying around the Broadhurst stage before the evening was over that we couldn't say for sure whether Monica Sefton was guilty of acting as a Japanese agent in Australia or not.

On the whole we rather think not, since she is the heroine of the play and melts into the arms of her husband, a handsome American newspaper corrspondent, as the curtain falls.

It cannot be denied, however, that things looked very black for Monica when Chief Inspector Burke arrived to find out why Ezra Wharton's chauffeur was discovered dead in the Seftons' living room cupboard, clawed by a cat whose paws had been dipped in curare. Monica, it seemed, was writing a mystery novel and had been reading up on poisons for months. And she couldn't find her manuscript anywhere. Worse yet, she was born in Japan!

A Parcel of Jap Flags

Ezra Wharton himself was clawed in his own apartment only a few hours before, and when the authorities searched his place, didn't they find a parcel of Japanese flags hidden among his personal effects? They certainly did.

By this time nobody in the audience would have been especially surprised to see Hirohito himself plunge through the Seftons' first-floor window, followed by the entire royal family. But although "Lady in Danger" is billed as a comedy-mystery, it did not go quite that far for laughs.

It did, however, have Chief Inspector Burke arrest Mrs. Sefton for murder, take her down to headquarters, and then let her go out to Dr. Gresham's nursing home because she had a fit of hysterics.

If any member of the Melbourne police force happens to visit New York during the run of this play, there will probably be another murder at the Broadhurst. Fortunately we doubt if the run will be extensive and the Melbourne police are probably fully occupied at the moment in Melbourne.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 30, 1945

'Lady in Danger' Has Premiere

By BURTON RASCOE

THINGS occur in the theater, from time to time, about which a drama critic should say only: "This is a mistake; it will be quietly withdrawn and there is no point in offending all the players who rehearsed and gave their time to it, or in offending the backer who put up the money for it, or in offending the producers who thought they had something to sell. Forget it."

That's how I feel about "Lady in Danger," which was produced at the Broadhurst last night. It is simply and unbelievably bad melodrama, so bad that Dr. Charles Bragin, the connoisseur of nickel-and-dime-novels, tells me there was never a nickel-novel ever so badly constructed as "Lady in Danger."

"I suspect," said Dr. Bragin (a very serious-minded man, who knows classical literature as well as dime-novels), "that the authors of this play have never read more than two or three nickel-novels."

In these columns I am not going to remind anybody, except one, that he, or she, was connected, in any way, with such a fiasco . . . My exception is Vicki Cummings . . . Miss Cummings, with the pillars falling in on you and all the stiffs falling out closets, you were grand! But it is not their fault that your fellow players didn't show up better; the play is a zero; YOU couldn't carry it.

NEW YORK SUN
March 30, 1945

'Lady in Danger,' One Of the Very Worst, Is Offered at the Broadhurst

By WARD MOREHOUSE

WHEN summer really becomes official in New York, and has the calendar as well as the temperature to prove it, the theater can hardly do worse than it did last night at the Broadhurst. For "Lady in Danger," sent on from Detroit and given its first local performance, is something to wonder about—and something to avoid.

Billed as a comedy-mystery, and its authorship attributed to Max Afford and Alexander Kirkland, it comes forth as a plodding, inept and hopeless piece—badly written and played. Pat Allen and Dan Fisher are the producers and the experienced Clarence Derwent is the director. I'll try to forgive him.

In "Lady in Danger" a big black cat, whose claws are believed to have been poisoned, and a pretty girl who writes mystery novels become implicated in the double murder of an Australian quisling and his chauffeur. The cat doesn't live to defend itself, but the heroine goes through a harrowing evening and is about to be done in by hanging by a Jap agent when the Law, represented by the Inspector and his men, comes charging through the door. The killer turns out to be just the fellow you had been suspecting all along if you had been listening and watching through the play's three heavy-going acts.

Helen Claire, Vicki Cummings, Mr. Derwent and Mr. Kirkland have roles in this play, which seems to have had Australian success. Mr. Kirkland has done some revision for New York, but the whole thing got completely out of hand. The single setting was designed by Harry Gordon Bennett.

A body falls out of a closet in the first act (as in "Mr. and Mrs. North") and the terrified heroine is about to be killed in that same closet in the third act, but for all that "Lady in Danger" offers a minimum of excitement. It's clumsy and slow-going.

And it won't do.

"The Firebrand of Florence"

Musical play by Edwin Justus Mayer and Ira Gershwin; staging by John Murray Anderson; settings by Jo Mielziner; music by Kurt Weill; lyrics by Mr. Gershwin; dances by Catherine Littlefield; presented by Max Gordon at the Alvin Theatre, March 22, 1945.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 23, 1945

"The Firebrand of Florence"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

EDWIN JUSTUS MAYER'S famous "Firebrand" came back to town last evening. It did so in the guise of Max Gordon's latest musical, and this time it is called "The Firebrand of Florence." Second things usually are not as good as first things, and in this the new show is no exception. Despite a Kurt Weill score, the original author's collaboration with Ira Gershwin on the book, and a lavish production, Benvenuto Cellini's return to the stage is not a happy one. "The Firebrand of Florence" lacks sparkle, drive, or just plain nervous energy; it is a little like an old-fashioned operetta, slowly paced and ambling.

* * *

The blame probably may be distributed more or less evenly on all sides, save Mr. Gordon's purse. The book is a simple one and there is not much of it, but wit has been kept carefully away and bright lines are absent. Mr. Gershwin's lyrics are not outstanding; his purest muse must have stood blind-folded at his side this time. Nor is Mr. Weill's score the best which has come from his piano. One or two of the songs have a good rhythm, and another has a tinkling, gay charm, but the rest are casual and not distinguished. The dancing is brief, and that, too, is not equal to the dances of a number of other musicals. The costumes, however, are colorful, and visually the Alvin stage is in order, even though it is not in other directions.

The company is a large one, and when he has a chance John Murray Anderson, the director, has been able to fill his stage with swirling figures. Too often the soldiers, promenaders and the courtiers depart, however, leaving one or two persons and something akin to a somnolent state of gloom. Melville Cooper, one of the most amusing actors in the business, manages to put a little comedy into the part of the Duke; the evening could stand a great deal more of both Mr. Cooper and comedy. Earl Wrightson, a newcomer, is Cellini; he has a good voice and does well by the Firebrand. Beverly Tyler, as Angela, is attractive; Lotte Lenya, who in home life is Mrs. Weill, is miscast as the Duchess.

Mr. Weill did not stint in setting down his score, for there are all types of songs and there are many of them. Songs in musicals are meant to be hummed afterward, and for that purpose he has offered "There'll Be Life, Love and Laughter" and "The Night Time Is No Time for Thinking." A tune named "My Dear Benvenuto" has a catchy air, and "Sing Me Not a Ballad" is nice, although Miss Lenya does not

THE CAST

Hangman	Randolph Symonette
Tartman	Don Marshall
Souvenir Man	Bert Freed
Maffio	Boyd Heathen
Arlecchino	Jean Guelis
Columbina	Norma Gentner
Pierot	Eric Kristen
Flomina	Diane Meroff
Pantalone	Hubert Bland
Fiorinetta	Mary Alice Bingham
Gelfomino	Kenneth Le Roy
Rosania	Mary Grey
Dottore	William Vaux
Magistrate	Marion Green
Cellini	Earl Wrightson
Captain of the Guard	Charles Sheldon
Ottaviano	Ferdi Hoffman
Ascanio	James Dobson
Emelia	Gloria Story
Angela	Beverly Tyler
Marquis	Paul Best
Duke	Melville Cooper
Page	Billy Williams
Duchess	Lotte Lenya
Major-domo	Walter Graf
Clerk of the Court	Alan Noel

Models — Yvette Heap, Doris Blake, Marya Iversen, Gedda Petry, Rose Marie Elliot and Perdita Chandler.

Apprentices — John Cassidy, Lynn Alden, Walter Rinner and Frank Stevens.

give it all she might. As lyricist, Mr. Gershwin is at his best in such a number as "You Have to Do What You Do Do," where complexities always keep up a poet's spirit—and that of an audience.

There can be no doubt, however, that the production itself is a beautiful one to see. Jo Mielziner has designed the settings, and Raoul Pene du Bois the brilliant costumes. If the book, music and acting were up to their physical dressings, the return of "The Firebrand" would be a special event of the first order. They are not, however, so neither is "The Firebrand of Florence."

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 23, 1945

Cellini Proves Dull Company

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MUSICALLY, *The Firebrand*—Edwin Justus Mayer's amusing historical comedy of the '20s—seems jinxed. Fifteen years ago Horace Liveright sponsored a musical version of it, called *The Dagger and the Rose*, that died a-borning in Atlantic City. Now a good many highly gifted people, including Mr. Mayer himself, have collaborated on an entirely new musical version; but their collaboration of talents seems half a conspiracy of dullness. *The Firebrand of Florence* is very unjust — as *The Firebrand* was not—to the gay impudence, the stylish gallantry, the dashing villiany, the inborn *dissevoltura* of Benvenuto Cellini. It plays only a dull child's game of Cellini-meeny-miny-mo with him. It weighs him down, it flattens him out. There is little to distinguish *The Firebrand of Florence* from a score of other period musicals with vaguely swashbuckling heroes and specifically soporific plots.

To be fair to it, *The Firebrand of Florence* is much more operetta than musical comedy, and should probably be treated so. As operetta, it has its musical assets. Kurt Weill, deserting the chic manner of *Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus*, has turned out a big romantic score, much of it full-bodied and tuneful; much of it pleasantly sung. What the music lacks is character and variety; the songs do not rise above a tradition, and, they are not effectively set off against one another. Ira Gershwin's lyrics are often ingenious and clever, but they lack his usual gaiety and sparkle.

* * *

As for the book, it can be let off more lightly in terms of operetta (where librettos as a rule are even sadder than they are in musical comedy), but it can hardly be more warmly cherished. Here and there are actually some witty lines, but theirs is a frail wit, lost among puerile antics. But for the most part there is only ponderous or skittish fooling, and a vast stretch of routine story to traverse. Playing the scatterbrained Duke of Florence, Melville Cooper is as nimble as always; but it is a nimbleness mainly expended on avoiding disaster.

The show suffers also from a minimum of dancing. There are (perhaps from a desire to be historical) virtually no full-stage routines, only some brief Brueghel-like figurations, and some good special bits by Jean Guelis. Jo Mielziner has done some nice sets, and Raoul Pene DuBois some brilliantly colored costumes.

The cast aside from Mr. Cooper, is not very remarkable, though Earl Wrightson makes a pleasing Cellini with a pleasing voice. As Angela, Beverly Tyler, who is making her stage debut, is no more than an adequate ingenue; and Lotte Lenya plays the Duchess in a mannered European fashion.

The Firebrand of Florence is certainly well-intentioned. It just never captures the spirit of *The Firebrand;* it just lacks life.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 23, 1945

Benison to Spring

By HOWARD BARNES

A MUSICAL show of rare delight has come to the Alvin Theater. "The Firebrand of Florence" has melodic eloquence, lyrical felicity and a company that can sing and still be understood. Since it is backed up by Edwin Justus Mayer's justly celebrated stage biography of Benvenuto Cellini, and is lovely to look upon, this Max Gordon production is a benison to the spring season. There are some dullish stretches in the first act, when the plot has a tendency to trip up the songs and panoply, but Melville Cooper comes charging to the rescue with captivating flippancies and pantomime to bring the piece to a stunning climax.

* * *

A new musical is a clumsy definition for such an offering as this. Essentially, it is a farcical operetta, in which words and music are woven into a very satisfying whole. Ira Gershwin, who has collaborated with Mayer on the libretto in addition to composing the lyrics, deserves a very large nod for the success of the enterprise. His lines are singularly singable and vastly entertaining. "A Rhyme for Angela," "There'll Be Life, Love and Laughter," or "You Have to Do What You Do Do," sustain the mood of a swashbuckling sixteenth-century story with pertinent and comic exuberance. Kurt Weill's music does the rest.

* * *

For this is certainly one of the finest scores that the gifted composer has written for the theater. In addition to the songs already noted, he has tossed in such enchanting tunes as "You're Far Too Near Me," "Just In Case" and "Love Is My Enemy." Since the singers, from the principals to the brilliant choral ensembles, do justice to both the music and the words, "The Firebrand of Florence" is a true music drama. There isn't a dull song in the show and there are more than enough to go around.

* * *

One might have wished to see more of Melville Cooper in the early sections of the work. He brings a comic lift to the dramatic action which is irresistible and gets in there and sings, to boot. His impersonation of the dopey Duke of Florence, who doesn't know whether to hang Cellini or make him his bodyguard, is a fine bit of clowning. The chief chanting is done by Earl Wrightson, in the title role and Beverly Tyler, as the sculptor's infatuated model. The former combines ease of manner with vocal proficiency. The latter is comely and very pleasant to hear. Lotte Lenya, Paul Best and the others round out the plot with proper emphasis, and the dancers are excellent. John Murray Anderson gets credit for the staging and is fortunate in having Jo Mielziner designing the settings and Raoul Pene DuBois the costumes. "The Firebrand of Florence" is just what the spring season needed.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 23, 1945

'Firebrand of Florence' Has Hot Lyrics, Warm Score, Cool Book

By JOHN CHAPMAN

For "The Firebrand of Florence"
I have no great abhorrence.
The Ira Gershwin lyrics
Induced in me hysteerics,
Being tricky
And seldom icky,
The music by Kurt Weill would beguile
The dullest ear; but I wish I could forget about the plot—
for "The Firebrand" is old-style operetta.
Hot-cha!

MAX GORDON, an old master of musical shows, presented "The Firebrand" last night at the Alvin Theatre, and the show is all about another old master, Benvenuto Cellini. It is beautifully set by Jo Mielziner and enchantingly costumed after the Italian ancients by Raoul Pene du Bois. It has a lovely score done in lush operetta style by Mr. Weill, and it is blessed by the comic playing of Melville Cooper.

In spite of all these beneficences and some others, I felt a good bit was lacking. The book, based by Edwin Justus Mayer and Mr. Gershwin on Mr. Mayer's old play, "The Firebrand," lacks pace. The witty rhymes of the lyrics cannot put enough spice into a plot about how the dumb old Duke of Florence wants to hang that great artist and great lover, Cellini.

Melville Cooper's Show

Mr. Cooper, as the Duke, is the star of the evening, and Lotte Lenya, as the Duchess, is most unhappily cast. To her goes the best song of many excellent songs, "Sing Me Not a Ballad," and she fails to sell it because she and the number are not the same type. "Sing Me Not" would be a wow for Ethel Merman.

There are many attractive people in "The Firebrand of Florence," including Earl Wrightson as Cellini, Beverly Tyler as the model with whom he is in love, Gloria Story as a pert little Florentine honey and Ferdi Hoffman, late of "Angel Street," as the most villainous music-show villian on the stage today.

John Murray Anderson has staged the production with his customary fine eye for color and opulence, and there are some nice and not-too-obtrusive dance interludes directed by Catherine Littlefield. Last night's audience was particularly fond of the principal dancers, Jean Guelis and Norma Gentner. Mr. Weill has orchestrated his own music—something unheard-of in these days of one-fingered composers—and has given it exciting color and verve.

NEW YORK POST
March 23, 1945

'Firebrand of Florence' Strikes Very Few Sparks

By WILELLA WALDORF

AS WE remember Edwin Justus Mayer's play, "The Firebrand," it was very good fun. The musical version presented last night at the Alvin Theatre as "The Firebrand of Florence," however, is for the most part an elaborate bore, enlivened at odd moments by Melville Cooper as the nit-wit Duke, lavishly decorated with lovely Renaissance scenery and costumes designed by Jo Mielziner and Raoul Pene DuBois, and distinguished by one of Kurt Weill's finest scores, not always projected as it should have been.

It's book trouble again, of course, but that isn't the whole story. Edwin Justus Mayer and Ira Gershwin have managed to extract an extremely tiresome script from Mr. Mayer's play, and Mr. Gershwin's lyrics range from second to third, fourth and even fifth rate W. S. Gilbert.

But much of Mr. Weill's music is uncommonly fine and he has arranged some skillful and beguiling orchestrations that often sound very lovely as Maurice Abravanel and his musicians interpret them. It is a pity that poor casting in some of the leading roles puts a strain on both book and music that neither are quite able to bear.

Earl Wrightson, in the title role, is the only one of the major principals who has a voice of quality and who sings with any sort of style. He is an attractive baritone, and it is a pleasure to listen to him. Unfortunately he is no actor, and possesses about as much Florentine fire as any nice young American in a church choir. As Benvenuto Cellini, he strikes very few sparks.

Beverly Tyler as the model Angela is a pretty ingenue whose stage deportment is deplorably amateur and whose vocalizing is nearly always painful. As for Lotte Lenya as the Duchess, let us say simply that she fails to meet the demands of the part either as singer or comedienne.

This leaves poor old Melville Cooper to try to make something comical of the Duke's role —acted so hilariously by Frank Morgan in the original play. Mr. Cooper is a funny fellow, but he has very poor material in "The Firebrand of Florence."

Under the circumstances Mr. Weill's music comes over much better in the ensemble numbers than it does as solos, duets, etc. Some of the group singing is spirited and effective. The first scene, where Cellini is almost hanged, offers a good deal of movement and color, but on the whole the production has a clumsy air about it that is hardly to be associated with a professional Broadway musical attraction these days, despite the beauty and opulence of its decor.

NEW YORK SUN
March 22, 1945

'The Firebrand of Florence,' Done at Alvin, Burdened With Listless Book

By WARD MOREHOUSE

IN THE first half of the frenzied Twenties, when fifty-odd playhouses were operating in the Broadway area and book publishers (specifically, the late Horace Liveright) were hurtling into the play-producing business, "The Firebrand" was a hit, and people have been saying ever since that it was a piece that should be set to music. Well, last night it was.

Put to music of Kurt Weill, it was revealed at the Alvin as Max Gordon's production of "The Firebrand of Florence." Result: a song and dance show of definite shortcomings. There are beautiful costumes and settings and some nice lyrics by Ira Gershwin, but Mr. Weill has written better scores and the book is indeed a dreary one.

There is also the fact that the principals are generally unexciting. Earl Wrightson sings well enough as Cellini, and Beverly Tyler is vocally excellent as Angela, Cellini's model, and she is rather an eyeful, but they are both only tolerable when it comes to dialogue and action, and the book fashioned by Edwin Justus Mayer and Mr. Gershwin is such a plodding affair that even so sure a comedian as Melville Cooper, in the role of the Duke, has his difficulties.

"The Firebrand of Florence" cost a lot of money and looks it. In two acts and ten scenes, which take you from the public square in Florence on to the summer palace and eventually to the palace of the king of France, the new musical piece depicts the amours and the escapades of the dashing sixteenth century Benvenuto Cellini, who is always just missing the hangman's noose. The production is colorful all the way, and there are some lovely groupings and fine choral effects, but the show never really gets going and the tedious interludes come along frequently.

Mr. Weill's best tunes are "There'll Be Life, Love and Laughter," "You're Far Too Near Me," "You Have to Do What You Do Do" and "A Rhyme for Angela," for which there are some first-rate Gershwin lyrics. In this number, particularly, the show comes to life.

Jo Mielziner's settings are spectacular and the costumes of Raoul Pene DuBois imaginative and lovely. I've seen Melville Cooper in better parts but never in such dazzling raiment as that supplied him at the Alvin. Besides the Messrs. Cooper and Wrightson and Miss Tyler, the principals include Lotte Lenya, who has had her continental successes, and Ferdi Hoffman, engaged with "Angel Street" not so long ago.

Max Gordon has been prodigal in the staging of "The Firebrand of Florence," which is more operetta than musical comedy. It's a production that has color, beauty and good dancing, but sustained buoyancy is lacking and the book is as listless as any that has come this way in a long time.

"The Firebrand of Florence" isn't likely to have the success achieved by Edwin Justus Mayer's play of the Broadway theater of two decades ago.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 22, 1945

'The Firebrand of Florence' Casts a Feeble Flame

By BURTON RASCOE

"THE FIREBRAND OF FLORENCE," an old-fashioned cloak-and-sword musical, which opened at the Alvin last night, is another one of those costly mistakes like "Jackpot" and "Rhapsody."

It has some pretty costumes and girls, but, except when Melville Cooper is clowning (which happens only for brief moments now and again during the show) the offering is dreary, vapid and inept.

Most of the melodies in Kurt Weill's score are definitely liturgical — watered Massenet for musical farce! There are a couple of singsong ditties which have some cute lyrics by Ira Gershwin.

One of them is "A Rhyme for Angela," which Mr. Cooper sings, but unfortunately Mr. Cooper was in very bad voice last night, with a cold, no doubt, and he didn't seem to care for the song much, anyway.

The other was "The Nightime Is No Time for Thinking," sung by Mr. Cooper, Beverly Tyler, Gloria Story and ensemble; and here, again, Mr. Cooper was too much in character as the absent-minded Duke, and only the vivacious and pretty Miss Story put pep into the item.

Cast Inadequate

With the exception of Mr. Cooper, Miss Story, Lotte Lenya and Randolph Symonette, the whole cast was either undistinguished or inadequate. Earl Wrightson, as Cellini, sings fairly well, but the moment he begins to speak, he has a flat, nasal quality, and thus he was a little preposterous in the swashbuckling, romantic role. Ferdi Hoffman was so hoarse he could hardly speak without making grating noises and others, too, were not at the top of their form.

But why anyone should have thought, in the first place, that Edwin Justus Mayer's only mildly successful comedy, "The Firebrand," produced by Horace Liveright back in the middle '20s, would make a good musical comedy I can't figure out. The only thing that was good about the original play was Frank Morgan's creation of the character of the Duke of Florence—a fictional ruling member of the de' Medici, whom Mr. Morgan comically conceived as having totally lost his powers of memory and concentration but with a mind which flickered vaguely whenever he saw a pretty girl.

Mr. Morgan was very funny in that show—so funny, indeed, that he has kept on playing the part, in modern variations, all these years in radio and in the movies and is still good. Playgoers, even on the opening night, forgot that Joseph Schildkraut was the star of that show; he was the Cellini. But there was nothing to the comedy except Frank Morgan.

Fair Comedy

Mr. Cooper is not as funny as Mr. Morgan was as the Duke, but he is an excellent comedian and he, alone, kept the audience awake last night, and most of them (there were only about 80 walker-outers in the orchestra after the first act) in their seats. His lines, in this show, are cornier and more insipid than Mr. Morgan's were in the original, but he made very droll use of them.

In my estimation, Catherine Littlefield, who arranged the dances for "The Firebrand of Florence," is one of the two or three most imaginative choreographers we have, as witness her work in "Hats Off To Ice," but she wasn't given a chance to show what she could do in this show, and so the dance numbers, too, are undistinguished, except for the solo work of the head of the Comedia Dell' Arte dancers, whose name is not indicated, but who has an almost Nijinski-like leap.

The costumes by Raoul Pene Du Bois are sumptuous orchestrations of the primary colors, red and yellow, with all the chromatic variations. The settings by Jo Mielziner are costly (apparently) but drab and uninteresting.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 22, 1945

Cellini Set to Music At Alvin Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

FIRST exposed as a straight comedy as long ago as 1924 or 1925, with Peppe Schildkraut, Frank Morgan, Eddie Robinson, Nana Bryant and Florence Mason in leading roles, last night was not the first time Edwin Justus Mayer's "The Firebrand" has been set to music.

Under the title of "The Dagger and the Rose" it was once sung and danced hard by Atlantic City's sad sea waves. It failed to reach Broadway. I don't recall the reason. Perhaps I never knew.

Slightly disguised as "The Firebrand of Florence," you'll find it at the Alvin. Libretto by the original dramatist. Lyrics by Ira Gershwin. Music by Kurt Weill. And Earl Wrightson, Melville Cooper, Ferdi Hoffman, Lotte Lenya and Beverly Tyler in leading roles.

This is the first song-and-dance show Max Gordon has lent his name to since "Sunny River" opened and shut like a book four years ago. An opulent undertaking, it's well on the old-fashioned side.

Mr. Gordon, aided and abetted by Meyer Davis and 20th Century-Fox, has spared no expense to make "The Firebrand of Florence" a wonder and a wow. But, to my way of thinking, there's more than enough of everything. Except humor! All the comic interludes fall to Mr. Cooper.

Once he hits his stride, he makes much of them. But there's not always sufficient Florentine fun-making to go around. Then, songs, sentiment, even satire, set in.

Florentine Trio

This "Firebrand of Florence" follows its parent play with loyalty. The elimination of unnecessary detail makes room for tunes, some of which are lovely; lyrics, some of which are clever; dances, two of which are stunning, and scenery, of which there is too much.

But the basic triangle—Cellini, young wolf in artist's clothing; Alessandro, old wolf in Ducal clothing; Angela, lovely model in virginal costumes by Raoul Pene duBois—still fight it out between them.

They fight it out in a public square in Florence, in Cellini's workshop, at the city's gates, in the garden of the Duke's Summer Palace, in a loggia in the City Palace, in the Grand Council Chamber, outside the City Palace, and in the palace of the King of France.

The Duke's Duchess also becomes involved. As in the elder version, she craves Cellini, while along with Cellini, the Duke craves Angela, while Angela, to tell the truth, remains more or less neutral.

When the Duke has nothing else to do, he arranges to hang Cellini, than arranges to unhang Cellini, and then, giving Cellini a decidedly unfair trial with himself as mediator, rearranges to hang Cellini all over again. He always wants to give the guy's neck a break, as they word it in the radio.

By final curtain time, they all run off to Paris. There, in one of Jo Mielziner's most eye-filling settings, they reprise a song called "There'll Be Life, Love and Laughter."

Cooper, Cut-up

Among other superior songs are "You're Far Too Near to Me," sung and resung by Angela and Cellini, as is the aforesaid "There'll Be Life and Love and Laughter." And a charming cavatina, "The Little Naked Boy." And the Duchess' ballad, "Sing Me Not a Ballad."

The Duke has four amusing numbers, both as to words and music—"Allesandro the Wise," "I Know Where There's a Cozy Nook," "A Rhyme for Angela" and "You Have to Do What You Do Do."

There're a couple of dozen songs in all—arias, madrigals, love songs, tarantellas, chants, ballads and the like—and, engaging and Kurt-Weill-ian as they are, Mr. Weill is yet to write a score as memorable as was his ill fated "Three Penny Opera."

Writing of that "Three Penny Opera," ill-fated only here in America, the Lotte Lenya who is so forthright and skillful as the Duchess, appeared in that work in Berlin and Vienna. Privately, she is Mrs. Weill.

Melville Cooper gives his best as the Duke of Florence. He has two scenes which are excruciating, during which he keeps the audience doubled up with laughter. Earl Wrightson is engaging and well-voiced as Cellini. Beverly Tyler is a pretty Angela. And keep your eyes on Jean Guelis.

"The Firebrand of Florence" is a high, wide and handsome show in Max Gordon's most expansive manner. The first audience adored the greater part of it,even if, as I suspect, many a modern may find it unduly dated.

BUY BONDS

"Kiss Them for Me"

Play by Luther Davis, based on Frederic Wakeman's novel, "Shore Leave"; staging by Herman Shumlin; settings by Frederick Fox; presented by John H. Moses and Mark Hanna at the Belasco Theatre, March 20, 1945.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 21, 1945

Three Fliers On a Binge

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE is enough that is enjoyable in *Kiss Them For Me* to make one wish it provided a full evening's entertainment. There is enough that is serious and honest to make one regret its compromises and counterfeiting. So few war plays have had any substance or significance that it seems a pity for Mr. Davis's to miss, by not too great a margin, having both. But it does miss. It runs out of material long before the end, and can only repeat itself or resort to small subterfuges. It tells more than a little truth about how fighting men feel when they get back home on leave, but it adulterates the truth with too much of the usual theater stuff, and at the end it loses its head and submits to a shabby trumped-up finale.

Kiss Them For Me tells of three valiant young South Pacific fliers in San Francisco on a four-day leave. What they want, and all they want, is women and liquor. But their leaves get pretty much gummed up. A shipbuilder puts heat on them to describe their experiences at his plant. A society girl lets one of them down. Navy orders send them to the hospital. These and other incidents provoke outbursts that reveal the fighting man's psychology—his contempt for the "paper navy" and for women who stall; his tough, understandably cynical attitude toward civilians; and the great gulf that separates him from civilian life. Some of this has not been put so bluntly in the theater before. Well conveyed, too, is the fliers' devotion to their jobs, so that when one of them gets a medical discharge and another is transferred to ground duty, they are almost heartbroken.

The trouble with *Kiss Them For Me* is that, having reflected its heroes' attitudes and reported their desires, the play has nothing to fall back on (beyond small incidents and random humor) except more of the same. It blunders, too, by inventing just enough complications to give it a mildly contrived air, and not enough to give it real flow and action. The second act falls below the first, which has nice humor and verve; and the third act —all snatching at crumbs and bogus wind-up —is pretty much of a disaster. *Kiss Them For Me* is a worthy try, with a good deal in it to enjoy and respect; but neither as document nor entertainment does it make the grade.

The production is, in general, a good one. Mr. Shumlin's direction is understanding and for the most part deft, though the weakness of the last act is accentuated by slow pacing. Richard Widmark does a very convincing job as one of the fliers, and Richard Davis a likable one as another; as the third, Dennis King, Jr., is only partly effective. Judy Holliday (long one of The Revuers) plays one of the girls excellently, and is a character-part find for Broadway. There is also a good performance in a bit part by Dudley Sadler.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 21, 1945

The Kiss Is Accepted

By HOWARD BARNES

THE new war play at the Belasco is laced with honesty. That is a good thing for a war play. "Kiss Them for Me" may not always hold to a dramatic balance, as it describes the somewhat frenetic leave of Naval aviator heroes in San Francisco. As a matter of fact, it goes definitely haywire in the climax, when fighter-bomber pilots extricate themselves from the civilian midst, of which they had fondly dreamed, to go back to the aircraft carrier, which they liken to a small town. The point is that Luther Davis has translated Frederic Wakeman's novel, "Shore Leave," with perception and authority; that Herman Shumlin has staged it brilliantly, and that the company is tops for the job.

• • •

There have been numerous mutations in the changing over of novel to drama, but they are generally to the good. Any one who has been close to the fighters of this war must appreciate the strong underlining which Davis has effected in making civilian life as terrible a challenge as the rigors of conflict in the South Pacific. The theme comes through with force and considerable emotional content at the Belasco. Wakeman had a good idea. It is given remarkably succinct dramatic definition in this production. When the piece falters it is because of structure rather than heart.

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Until the ending the acting validates every turn of the plot. Richard Widmark's bitter portrayal of a squadron commander, who refuses to believe that he is battle weary, is as right as it can be. His stealing of a leave and his subsequent dismay at finding that he is going to be grounded by the "paper Navy" finds him eloquent and impassioned. Richard Davis, as his exec and Dennis King jr., as a high-school boy brought to maturity in bombing Japs, back him up superbly, and Dudley Sadler has a poignant scene as a dying veteran in a west-coast hospital.

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Shumlin deserves great credit for keeping the boys on shore leave universal, rather than accidental figures of the war. He deserves even more credit for weaving their tale of fighting and fatigue into the web of civilian life. With the fine assistance of Judy Holliday, who plays the part of a lovely tramp, and Jayne Cotter, as a young woman who is able to see the war through the eyes of a valiant warrier, he has pulled "Kiss Them For Me" into an arresting play. It is never properly resolved and it winds up on a tasteless and contrived bit of slapstick, but for most of the time it speaks out in a clear and exciting theatrical idiom.

THE CAST

P. Neilson	John McGovern
Lieut.-Commander Wallace	Edward Crandall
Mississip	Dennis King Jr.
Mac	Richard Davis
Ensign	Douglas Jones
Crewson	Richard Widmark
Turnbill	Robert Allen
Wac	Sonya Stokowski
Alice	Judy Holliday
Gwynneth	Jayne Cotter
Tailor	Harold Grau
Chief	George Cory
Nurse Willinski	Virginia Kaye
Chief Nurse	Amy Douglass
Gunner	George Mathews
Hedrick	Dudley Sadler
Charlie	Daniel Petrie
Mr. Hardy	Paul Ford
Mrs. Hardy	Patricia Quinn O'Hara

NEW YORK POST
March 21, 1945

'Kiss Them for Me' Brings Three Rover Boys Back Home

By WILELLA WALDORF

"SHORE LEAVE," by Frederic Wakeman, has been described as a bawdy book about three battle-worn Naval flyers from the Pacific on leave in San Francisco. "Kiss Them for Me," Luther Davis' dramatization produced at the Belasco Theatre last night, is a confused, rambling and disjointed play about three Naval flyers on leave in San Francisco. There is nothing in the least bawdy about it, Commissioner Moss.

It is constantly being hammered into all of us on the home front that the boys who come back from overseas are going to be very touchy and hard to handle. Some authorities even hint that every civilian would do well to take a quick course in psychiatry before the war is over, lest the wrong approach be used when demobilization begins.

"Kiss Them for Me" seems to be trying to give us a preview of what to expect when some of the heroes come back to "Uncle Sugar." Crewson, Mac and Mississip, who have been shooting up the Japs for years from an aircraft carrier, miraculously get four days leave, and decide to spend it at a swanky San Francisco hotel with lots of liquor, a juke box and assorted females, only to have their good time interrupted by fools who don't understand what they've been through and what they want and don't want.

A stuffy shipbuilder insists that they spend some of their precious time making speeches to war workers for morale-boosting purposes. A Navy public relations officer gets the hotel to charge them nothing for their suite, but wants help on one or two stories. The "paper" Navy keeps getting in their hair at every turn, especially the hospital, which insists upon giving them all physical examinations.

The three of them sit around griping and sulking like small boys, until the doctors decide to "ground" Crewson for battle fatigue and return Mississip to civilian life because he has an enlarged spleen.

This outrageous decision on the part of the medicos so infuriates the trio that they suddenly forget their grouch and stage a madcap finale worthy of the Rover Boys.

In the course of the play one of the young officers remarks gloomily, "We're just a case of arrested development"—and we're afraid he's right.

"Kiss' Them for Me" strikes a querulous, self-pitying note on the part of the returned flyers that isn't very appealing, and the play as a whole is dull. Herman Shumlin as director hasn't been able to do much to help. A number of the characters seem to spend most of their time standing awkwardly in the background registering sympathy and concern while the three officers—played by Richard Widmark, Richard Davis and Dennis King Jr.—get on with their grousing.

The cheeriest moments of the performance are provided by an actress named Judy Holliday, who makes something amusing of a girl who happens along hunting for a pair of nylons.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 21, 1945

'Kiss Them for Me' More Phony Than Funny Comedy About Navy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ALL plays are made up in somebody's head, of course; but to be good they must never look made up on the stage. They must fool you into thinking you are seeing something real. "Kiss Them for Me," a comedy which opened last night at the Belasco, looks like the baldest invention—the most deliberate maneuvering of a small plot —and is therefore not interesting enough.

It is a Rover Boys or Frank Merriwell version of "The Three Musketeers," in which a trio of aviators indulge in four days' leave at the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco. It has in it a certain amount of shop talk, like allusions to Bupers, but it nevertheless sounds phony to this aisle-sitting civilian.

Based on a novel by Frederic Wakeman titled "Shore Leave," dramatized by Luther Davis and directed by Herman Shumlin, "Kiss Them for Me" is neither farce nor straight comedy. Its good moments are contributed by the pleasant playing of some amiable performers, rather than by anything inherent in the play itself.

Willing Performances

The three fliers, loaded with money, prepare for a four-day splurge in the swankiest hotel on the Golden Gate. Thanks to the dirty work of a civilian villain, they get tangled in Navy red tape and don't have any fun at all. Since they don't have any fun the audience can't be expected to have much, either.

There are some willing performances. Dennis King Jr. portrays a mushmouth Southerner, and mushmouth Southerners are always good for laughs on the stage. Richard Widmark, looking startlingly like Elliott Roosevelt, or maybe it's Jimmy, or somebody, is the d'Artagnan of the trio, and Richard Davis plays the other one.

Judy Holliday is amusing as a patriotic little bimbo who is willing to help the Navy any way she can, and Jayne Cotter handles the romantic interest, such as it is. But I didn't believe any of it, and somebody forgot to keep me laughing hard enough to forget I didn't believe it.

Mr. Shumlin may have got tired directing along about the third act. Anyhow, the final stanza is much too slowly paced. It begins with a drinking scene full of long silences, like the immensely funny drinking scene of "The Male Animal"—but it forgets to pick up speed after the drinking is over, when the plot is supposed to reassert itself.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 21, 1945

'Kiss Them for Me' Realistic, Forceful Play

By BURTON RASCOE

WE had a hint in "Snafu"—and a very good one—of the naturalistic reaction that was bound to set in after a prolonged diet over the air, in fiction, in the self-glorifying reports of some of the special correspondents of the magazines and in the theater, of the goo and glory stuff about the ennobling virtue of getting killed, which began with "The Eve of St. Mark" and has become stickier and stickier ever since Mr. Anderson's chromo paid out to the extent of about $750,000 including the motion picture rights.

But we weren't prepared in the theater yet (the theater lags far behind the book market) for as searing and shriveling an indictment of the patrioteers, glory exploiters and uniformed bureaucrats and as naturalistic a treatment of soldier behavior and sentiment as was exploded on the stage of Belasco last night. It was the presentation of "Kiss Them For Me" (the title is not at all sentimental; it is bitterly ironic) which Luther Davis has made out of Frederic Wakeman's astringent novel, "Shore Leave." I didn't expect such a play to be produced until long after the war—remembering that "What Price Glory?" and "Journey's End" did not appear until 1924 and 1929 respectively, years after the books and plays of the Arthur Guy Empeys and Coningsby Dawsons of the last war were forgotten.

Misplaced Laughter

So unprepared were some of the audience for a play as deep and touching as this that they seemed to think it was supposed to be funny and laughed their heads off when they should have been shedding tears of sympathy and compassion. They even thought it is very laughable to see a veteran of three years in the South Pacific shaking and shivering with an attack of tropical fever; and they regarded one of the most heart-breaking scenes in the play as jocose bawdry. . . . Out of respect for the majority of the audience, I must add that this element of insensitive persons was a small, though a noisy one.

The play hasn't anything like the dramatic impact of "What Price Glory?" and it has faults, not only of structure but of mood. This latter I think is largely the fault of Herman Shumlin, who directed the play and treated a hospital scene as though it was something out of "Good Night, Ladies" and made Jane Cotter act in so "patrician" a manner as to kill the whole effect of the role and render her distasteful when she wasn't simply a dummy; Miss Cotter is a beautiful girl whose previous roles show she is capable of playing the semiheroine of this drama as it should be played.

Judy Holliday's Show

On the other hand, Mr. Shumlin has so directed Judy Holliday—as a dumb but sweet little tart, who works in a war plant and wants to contribute more to the war effort—in such a way that she achieves a great personal triumph (in fact, steals the show) with an impersonation which could easily have been made vulgar and farcical but is, instead, touching and endearing. Richard Widmark, Dennis King Jr. and Richard Davis, as the three Navy air veterans on brief leave in San Francisco, also are so directed as not only to establish their separate characters but to make them credible and human in every way.

The story is of three Navy airmen who have long dreamed of the time when they will be flown back to San Francisco for a respite from bombing missions and of what happened to them during the four days ashore, which they expected to spend relaxing with girls and liquor, food and sleep. First they find themselves about to be exploited as heroes by a big shot war contract man and, when they insist on being left alone, the great man uses his influence in Washington to have them punished; they are forced into a hospital for a check-up, where many things are found wrong with them and are otherwise frustrated until they take a chance on being thrown in the brig in order to get back to the front, away from patrioteers and red tape.

Meanwhile, in language that is not as explicit as in the book, they have their say about many manifestations of what some civilians call patriotism (meaning their own profitable brand of it) but more in the spirit of disabused levity than in rancor. A strong, forceful and touching play which should make a great number of faces very red and is a real contribution to the war effort instead of a phony one.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 21, 1945

'Kiss Them for Me'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"KISS THEM FOR ME," which opened last evening at the Belasco, could have been one of the best of the war plays. Adapted by Luther Davis from Frederic Wakeman's novel, "Shore Leave," it has a good many things to say about the two armies—the fighting and the civilian. It has some nicely human and salty characters, and especially at the beginning a certain number of moving moments. But "Kiss Them for Me" also has a third act. Mechanical and badly done, it brings down the whole play like a pack of cards, leaving the taste of the evening disappointing and not a little infuriating. Having spent the first part of the play in good discussion, Mr. Davis tosses away his style to pick up a mood of grade B stock theatre, and his play so fails.

Three naval aviators are the chief characters. Through dubious methods they have reached San Francisco for a four-day leave. They want a hotel room, drinks and women, and not to think about the war. On their leave they meet up with a shipbuilder who wishes them to give a lecture to his workers; they meet misunderstandings of various sorts. They have about concluded the Pacific is better when they are plunged into a naval hospital and one is grounded and one discharged from the service. At the end, with a Rover Boy finish unworthy of their biographer, they start hitch-hiking their way back to battle stations.

In the earlier sections of the evening, Mr. Davis' dialogue is crisp and expert. Some of it is simply amusing and some has a serious undertone. Mr. Davis, and Mr. Wakeman before him, realize that the soldier returned suddenly to civilian surroundings may be lost, unhappy and a little uncertain. One of the men has a wife he doesn't want to see, another is the reverse. The "paper navy," with its flies and routine, comes in for some sarcastic attention. Mr. Davis understands there are problems and for a time he looks at them. Then he gets involved in a silly love affair and an anti-climactic third act, and as an honest play, "Kiss Them for Me" is through.

The playing generally is good. Richard Widmark is the ringleader of the aviators, and gives a good characterization of a casual young man wishing drinks and women and knowing how to go about getting them. Dennis King Jr. is a stocky companion from the South; Richard Davis is the third. By far the best performance of the evening, however, is that offered by Judy Holliday as a tramp who wanders into the hotel room, unashamed of what she can offer. Jayne Cotter has an unreal part as a stock society girl; George Mathews an honest one as a former gunner on the ship. Herman Shumlin has directed better at the beginning than the end; it would have taken Superman to have made anything satisfactory from that.

"Kiss Them for Me" started out to reach an objective and ended by flying away. The Navy does better.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 21, 1945

'Kiss Them for Me' Opens at Belasco

By ROBERT GARLAND

JOHN MOSES and Mark Hanna brought "Kiss Them for Me" to the belabored Belasco last evening. "Kiss Them for Me" is a new play by Luther Davis, based on the novel "Shore Leave" by Frederic Wakeman. I didn't think it was possible to make a play out of "Shore Leave." But Mr. Davis has. And a terribly touching play it is.

Frederick Fox has given the production two effective sets. Herman Shumlin's direction of his principal characters is excellent. I do think that the direction of the parents in the third scene went way off key. It was not in keeping with the rest of the play. Be this as it may, the cast turned in fine, true performances.

Writing about war is a daring thing to do at this particular time. Perhaps it's because such a bigger show is going on all around us. To get even a fraction of it into our theatre is something. Somehow just the sight of the red bath-robed boys of our hospitals, viewing an USO show, packs more drama than the boys are watching.

Luther Davis does, however, get his drama onto the stage. You believe in those three kids and their buddy in the hospital. You believe in the things they have gone through. You believe in their plans for a good time. And in their idea of a good time. You believe in the two girls that believe in them and their ideas. All in all, they are a swell group of people.

Shore Leave

Three navy airmen are on a four-day pass. They have a swell suite in the hotel, tray after tray of drinks, stingers, old-fashioneds, martinis, in fact the works. Oh yes, and a juke box! As an extra added attraction, a bellboy passes out cards advertising nylon stockings, with their room number. So you see the boys are prepared for quite a stay.

Into this wonderful set-up walks the paper navy and civilian life. This four-day heaven of theirs, which they plan not to leave, but let the world come to them. It does! And plenty. Forms to fill out, forms to sign, speeches to make, places to dine. No, it's not all what they planned it to be.

Routine physical checkup follows, then the blow of blows, two of them are definitely out. Out for good. Sure it's what they always wanted, but it's not the way they wanted it. To be out completely on the sidelines with routine jobs in the service or as civilians again is pretty awful. That's the fate that beckons two of them.

Well, the guys that have done such a magnificent job on the Japs are not to be stymied by a data department of facts, figures and what have you. They make their get-away. And in going, they leave behind two perfectly swell gals. And I'm afraid to say a life they

"Kiss Them for Me"—continued

no longer care to face again. Perhaps we all should feel a bit ashamed.

Right to Left

Two fairly new newcomers blossom forth in this production together with a brand new one. Reading from right to left, they are Richard Widmark, Jayne Cotter and Judy Holliday. Richard Davis and Dennis King Jr., also turn in fine performances. Miss Holliday was the surprise of the evening, and Mr. Shumlin gets credit for finding her.

Jayne Cotter, a really swell gal, has been playing cold and aloof gals, slightly on the snooty side for far too long. In this, she gets her first break. Jayne, this time is human, in fact she is a little forward. Jayne, recently of the ill-fated "Many Happy Returns," together with Neil Hamilton, prove they can do something if given the chance.

The same thing goes for Richard Widmark, who, to my mind, turned in a sorry performance in "Trio." This time he doesn't have to sit interminably on a couch and listen to interminable dialogue. This time he has a chance really th get in there and pitch. Which he does. And does well indeed.

Returning to Miss Holliday—she has looks and a sense of timing. She has a voice, the like of which I've seldom heard. All she has to do is say it, and it's funnier than anyone else could ever say it. All in all, they turn in fine jobs, the lot of them.

NEW YORK SUN
March 21, 1945

'Kiss Them for Me,' A Sparse Play, Falls Apart After Its First Act

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE playhouse that David Belasco built became the home last night of "Kiss Them for Me," a sparse and straggling play of on-leave naval combat flyers who find the home front just a little more rugged than the war zone ever had been. John Moses and Mark Hanna are the producers and Herman Shumlin, having no play of his own at the moment, has done the staging.

"Kiss Them for Me" is Luther Davis's dramatization of the Frederic Wakeman novel, "Shore Leave." It's a play that begins promisingly enough, with three heroes from the far Pacific on a four-day leave in San Francisco, but after a rather lively first act the piece begins to fall apart and in the third act it comes to a dead stop. The author hasn't put much life into his writing; he is deficient in construction, and Mr. Shumlin's direction doesn't seem to have helped greatly.

It is an ironic play. The trio of naval fliers, Crewson and Mississip and Mac, are all prepared for four wonderful days as they move into their fancy hotel suite with drinks, girls and a juke box. But their fun is short. They're immediately set upon for civilian exploitation of war heroes. They're hustled off to a naval hospital for a check-up and taken before a survey board, which marks one for discharge and another for non-combat duty. And they're a sad lot until they see a chance to board a plane that will take them back to action and to the one job they know—combat missions against the Japs. The complications of back-home life were just too overpowering.

This play doesn't hold together. Its material is curiously jumbled and along toward the middle of the evening Mr. Davis runs out of it. "Kiss Them for Me," for all its early promise, is actually no sturdier than "The Streets Are Guarded" or "Lower North," which had brief Belasco tenancy.

Richard Widmark, an oncoming young actor and recently of "Trio," gives a vibrant performance as the casual and sardonic Crewson, whose wife, back in Great Neck, has a baby which isn't his. Judy Holliday is very amusing as a girl who likes her Pacific heroes and is enormously obliging. Jayne Cotter is moderately good as Gwynneth, who falls for the magnetic Crewson, and promises to wait for him. Dennis King Jr. is more than a little wearying as Mississip.

"Kiss Them for Me" is slow and labored. I didn't like it.

"The Deep Mrs. Sykes"

Play by George Kelly; staging by Mr. Kelly; settings by Eleanor Farrington; presented by Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne at the Booth Theatre, March 19, 1945.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 20, 1945

Not So Deep

By HOWARD BARNES

GEORGE KELLY is juggling with profundities in his new play at the Booth. "The Deep Mrs. Sykes" finds the gifted author more dextrous than wise. There are burnished lines in this, his first drama in something like eight years. There are several incisive characterizations and an arresting situation or two, as he dissects a supposedly aware matron in a small town. All in all, the show exercises something of the tedium of watching a nimble-fingered fellow tossing quantities of dumb-bells in the air, without achieving much more than keeping them from thudding on the stage.

* * *

The thesis of the work, as the program takes pains to point out, is that a female egotist is much deadlier than a male, because it generally cloaks mere feminine jealousy. Kelly has quite a time elaborating this idea. Mrs. Sykes is cunningly obtuse in her suspicion that her husband is paying court to a neighboring pianist. A bibulous friend gets more bibulous by thinking that her spouse is the guilty suitor of a married woman, and the others in the cast do lots of talking. The denouement, which finds the title character as deep as a pavement puddle, is something less than dramatically electric.

* * *

Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne have certainly served the play elegantly. The company includes such competent workers in the Broadway vineyard as Catherine Willard, Jean Dixon, Romney Brent, Gwen Anderson, Neil Hamilton and Richard Martin. The settings are ornamental and the gowns deserve a write-up from my colleague, Miss Katherine Vincent. Unfortunately, there is too little honest and clear-cut writing in the script to justify its glad rags. So Mrs. Sykes is demonstrated to be a petty woman, making a tempest in a singularly small romantic teapot. So, in the name of the theater, what?

* * *

Of the players Miss Dixon does a major job of stealing a show of which she is only a small part. In the part of the drunken wife of a doctor, who suspects the worst, when she finds out that a newcomer to the town is receiving anonymous adulation, she has one scene of exciting power. Miss Willard is more content to look deep than create a convincing character and Brent, back from the Army, has no more than an uncomfortable walk-on. The author's staging, incidentally, is as specious as his piece, with people being rushed off stage to smoke a cigar when a couple of principals have to get together. "The Deep Mrs. Sykes" is a trivial contemplation of marital relationships.

THE CAST

Mr. Sykes	Neil Hamilton
Mrs. Sykes	Catherine Willard
Ada	Myra Forbes
May	Charlotte Keane
Cyril	Romney Brent
Myrtle Weaver	Margaret Bannerman
Mrs. Fentriss	Jean Dixon
Ralph	Richard Martin
Adeline	Mary Gildea
Roy	Ralph Glover
Ethel	Gwen Anderson
Mrs. Taylor	Katherine Anderson
Mr. Manzoni	Tom McElhany
Mr. Taylor	Grandon Rhodes

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 20, 1945

George Kelly's 'Deep Mrs. Sykes' is a Frail Little Disappointment

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE infrequency with which George Kelly writes a play is, season after routine season, a matter for disappointment on our part, for Mr. Kelly can write for the stage as well as any living practitioner of this black art. The scarcity of his dramas is, as well as a disappointment to ourselves, a disadvantage to Mr. Kelly, for no human faculty can remain robust without exercise.

"The Deep Mrs. Sykes," which was presented last night at the Booth and is the first drama to come from the Kelly pen in eight years, is vitiated and attenuated. It is like a cultured, clear-thinking person who has deliberately starved himself for a long period—awfully nice, and all that, but wobbly on the pins and blue around the gills. A good big mess of meat and potatoes would help.

Women are usually Mr. Kelly's targets, and I still laugh every time I think of the hilarious indignities which he inflicted upon Mary Boland in "The Torchbearers." In "The Deep Mrs. Sykes" he is after Mrs. Sykes, in part, and women, in general. He thinks their feminine intuition is an intentional fraud and exposes it.

Nothing much happens, in the sense of movement and event, in "The Deep Mrs. Sykes." People stand around and talk and by talking reveal themselves. Most of the women are suspicious bitches and most of the men are gentle and dumb. Mrs. Sykes suspects her husband of admiring a female neighbor and Mrs. Sykes is dead wrong.

Everybody Is Dull

She is also quite dull, and so is her husband, and so is the female neighbor, and so is the play. Not all of Mr. Kelly's artistry as a dramatist and as a director—and his talent for making actors look and talk like human beings is admirable—can make "The Deep Mrs. Sykes" seem much better than it is; and what it is is a playlet, or a little play.

It has, moreover, some uncomfortable moments in which several players must stand around listening while one other player Reveals All in a long speech. No matter how good the long speech is, and how well it is acted, one wishes that the rest of the cast would get the lead out of their pants and walk offstage and have a good stiff drink.

The company which has been assembled by Producers Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne is quite good. Neil Hamilton is nice but stuffy as Mr. Sykes; Catherine Willard is a high-nosed egotist as Mrs. S.; Jean Dixon is noisy and bitter as a lady drunk. Among those who stand around gracefully and occasionally say something gracefully are Romney Brent, Charlotte Keane, Margaret Bannerman, Richard Martin and Gwen Anderson.

I hope Mr. Kelly doesn't spend the next eight years brooding, thinking or sulking. He ought to pitch in and write another play and build up his muscles.

NEW YORK POST
March 20, 1945

'The Deep Mrs. Sykes' At the Booth—A Drama Of Marital Manners

By IRENE THIRER

". . . there are egotist women. And they say they're really much deadlier than the male: because their egotism usually passes for mere feminine jealousy." So says the philosophical Mr. Sykes—who doesn't love Mrs. Sykes, and she knows it. "Intuitively" she knows too that he's the lover of the new next-door neighbor, Mrs. Taylor. Only—he isn't! Suspecting her own husband's infidelity, nevertheless she makes her dipsomaniac friend Mrs. Fentriss believe that it's HER spouse who has been sending Mrs. Taylor white lilacs, in appreciation of her piano playing. It isn't Dr. Fentriss either!

There are two stunning drawing room sets, and two wordy-wordy acts—with occasional smartly brittle lines—in George Kelly's new comedy-drama of marital manners, "The Deep Mrs. Sykes," which opened last evening at the Booth Theatre.

Makes You Hate Her

Mrs. Sykes is a thoroughly obnxious person and Catherine Willard does a right good job of making you loathe her. She plays her son against her husband; foolishly protects the former's health when he has a perfectly nice wife (who doesn't call Mrs. S. "mother") to love and watch over him; pretends to be the soul of virtue, whereas actually she spreads venom wherever she treads. Mr. Sykes, who is personified with suave behavior and pleasantly clipped diction by Neil Hamilton, takes it like a man—and doesn't mind much because he IS in love with another woman, but not Mrs. Taylor. His egotist wife would never dream of being envious of her spinster chum, Myrtle Weaver (Margaret Bannerman, who's charming—but then she's just about the only feminine member of the featured cast who isn't painted as a hussy or a drunkard or a green-eyed monster.)

And then what? It develops that the Sykes' son Ralph is indeed the one—obsessed by a new form of puppy love although he's married and a father—who has been sending the posies. Ralph Sykes loves Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Ralph Sykes knows it "intuitively" (that word is heavily played all through the evening), an thinks she can pretty well bear it—because she loves Ralph!

It works out to a fairly favorable finish when Mr. Taylor up and announces that he's going to sell his house and take his bride off to New York to live. Without the disturbing element, there'll be no more white lilacs!

As performances go, all of these are workmanlike and thoroughly professional. Jean Dixon's chronically inebriated Mrs. Fentriss is really an impressive character job which mingles chills with giggles. Katherine Anderson is the pleasant Mrs. Taylor who causes all the trouble. Romney Brent, Tom McElhany, Grandon Rhodes, Richard Martin, Mary Gildea, Ralph Glover, Gwen Anderson, Myra Forbes, and Charlotte Keane round out the cast. Author George Kelly directed.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 20, 1945

'The Deep Mrs. Sykes' Is Distinguished Drama

By BURTON RASCOE

GEORGE KELLY, author of such hits as "The Torchbearers," "The Show-Off," and the Pulitzer Prize winning "Craig's Wife," as well as such meritorious failures as "Daisy Mayme," "Behold the Bridegroom," "Philip Goes Forth," and "Reflected Glory," is such a precisionist and so resolutely determined neither to repeat himself nor become a formula-writing Broadway hack that you have to wait anywhere from two to eight years for a play by him; but when it comes it is worth waiting for. It may not be a popular success; but it is sure to be a distinguished and brilliant piece of writing, new and unorthodox in concept, fresh in treatment and sound in thought and craftsmanship.

Such is his "The Deep Mrs. Sykes," which opened at the Booth last night. It is the pleasantest of Mr. Kelly's "unpleasant" plays (as G. B. Shaw termed a group of his own); but it is essentially a moral tragedy in terms of sophisticated contemporary behavior.

Terrific Denouement

The denouement is so unconventional (in the theatrical sense) and therefore so unexpected (by me) and the events leading up to it so suspenseful that no one who has seen the play (least of all a critic) should tell you anything about it, if you expect to see the show yourself. Yet the whole point of the story and the emotional tension that is built up for nearly two hours lies in this denouement. It is touching, ghastly and terrific.

Without spoiling it for you, I can tell you this much: It is another of Mr. Kelly's searching analyses of the awful compensations of an emotionally frustrated woman. Mr. Sykes says of, and to, his wife (which should give you an idea of the unhappy atmosphere into which you are plunged) in the first act: "There are egotist women . . . much deadlier than the male, because their egotism usually passes for mere feminine jalousy."

Mrs. Sykes' egotism is a constant exaction of a terrible revenge against a moral, faithful and conventionally upright husband. What the revenge is prompted by, you will have to learn for yourself; but it takes the form of self-hallucination. Mrs. Sykes believes her "feminine intuition" is so acute, her mystical perception so unerring that she reads people's minds and knows what is going to happen before it happens.

Product of Nature

In matter of pure fact, she is an exceedingly stupid woman, who never sees anything the way it is—even the most obvious things in her own household. And yet so utterly convinced is she of her great depth and her unerring perception and so domineering, energetic and imperious is she that she excites fear of her power in a poor, mentally deranged female alcoholic, driving her to tragic excesses of jealous suspicion of her husband and, in general, makes life a hell all around her.

But, when the play is over, you see that Mr. Kelly has truthfully shown that, in the circumstances, it is not Mrs. Sykes' who is the villainess but Mother Nature herself; and so you not only conceive a sort of inverted sympathy for her but also understand why Mr. Sykes puts up with her. It is another of Mr. Kelly's "distressingly truthful" dramatizations of the poignant tears of things.

The cast, superbly directed by Mr. Kelly, is a stellar one, bringing three popular players—Jean Dixon, Catherine Willard and Romney Brent—back to Broadway after long absences, and presenting such other favorites as Neil Hamilton, Margaret Bannerman, Gwen Anderson and Tom McElhany. Miss Dixon scores highest honors in the very difficult role of a garrulous and disagreeable dipsomaniac, but Miss Willard is a close second as the ineffable Mrs. Sykes. Richard Martin, a newcomer, has a fine moment or two as the befuddled scion of the Sykes household. Eleanor Farrington has designed the production with taste and intelligence. An adult play for adult minds.

NEW YORK SUN
March 20, 1945

There's Sound Theatre in George Kelly's Play, 'The Deep Mrs. Sykes'

By WARD MOREHOUSE

GEORGE KELLY, in twenty-odd years of play writing, has given distinguished service to the theater. He is a meticulous dramatist and always an unhurried one. Now, after an absence of eight years, he brings along some sound theater in a perceptive play, "The Deep Mrs. Sykes," offered last night at the Booth by Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne.

In "The Deep Mrs. Sykes" the author of "The Show-Off" and "Craig's Wife" writes of the deadlier sex, women, and brings forth his observations on love, jealousy and marriage, making the point that one-sided marriages do go on—and do does life.

The Carrie Sykes of the new Kelly drama is a cold, self-centered, egotistical woman of malice and delusions—delusions as to her own intuition and omniscience. She is not unlike Mrs. Craig (Pulitzer Prize) in her possessiveness and arrogance. The ructions that she can create are considerable but her own secret tragedy lies in her knowledge that her husband does not love her.

No time is specified in "The Deep Mrs. Sykes"; no locale is named. The shallowness of Mrs. Sykes is exposed by the device of a bouquet of white lilacs. One of the Sykes's neighbors—he lives just across the Avenue—has brought his new and attractive wife to the neighborhood and white lilacs have been sent her following a party at the club. Mrs. Sykes suspects her husband. Mrs. Fentriss, given to heavy drinking because of her jealousy, believes that her own doctor-husband, bought the flowers and Mrs. Sykes lets her go on thinking so. But the man who really sent those lilacs is the young married son of Mr. and Mrs. Sykes. He is infatuated with the neighbor's bride and so he tells his father and mother. But the all-knowing Mrs. Sykes will have none of it; she is convinced he is trying to shield his father. And her intuition will never permit her to believe otherwise.

Mr. Kelly's play is told in two acts. It takes a bit of a time to get going but in its second act the play is stronger and holds your attention every instant. And certainly it is helped along by the author's superb direction and by the fine performances of an excellent group of players.

Catherine Willard is the empty, illogical, self-deluded and venomous Mrs. Sykes and she makes an expert job of it. Jean Dixon, an actress all of us have been missing, gives a compelling performance as the sardonic Mrs. Fentriss. Neil Hamilton is a restrained actor under the Kelly direction and comes through with an affecting father-and-son scene, played with Richard Martin. And Gwen Anderson, as the unloved young wife of the Sykes boy, has a beautiful scene at the end of the play. Margaret Bannerman and Katherine Anderson are forceful and attractive in secondary roles.

"The Deep Mrs. Sykes" is slight. It is not a play of great vitality, but it is certainly an interesting one of thought and psychology. And it's good to have Mr. Kelly back.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 20, 1945

'Deep Mrs. Sykes' Arrives at Booth

By ROBERT GARLAND

GEORGE KELLY and "The Deep Mrs. Sykes" came to town last night. Not only did Mr. Kelly and "Mrs. Sykes" arrive, but their luggage, plainly marked "Theatre."

Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne are responsible for bringing us these wonderful people at the Booth. Eleanor Farrington provides them with two effective settings. And Mr. Kelly, the author, does even as well with his direction. That is saying something. Too long have we been without Mr. Kelly. His "Craig's Wife" and "The Torchbearers" are highlights of the theatre. In fact Mr. Kelly's plays are theatre.

It's the women of the theatre that make theatre, and no one to my mind, catches the workings of a woman's mind to such high degree as Mr. Kelly. Not a particular type of woman's mind, mind you, but in all its stages and all situations.

Very few authors are able to transplant their typewritten people into real moving about people that act as naturally as they read. Mr. Kelly does it. From Mrs. Sykes first entrance delivering her opening speeches with her back to the audience, you know that he knows what he is doing. And he does it right along. Even the tough scene—the